

999 Liawen Ct. NE
Atlanta, GA 30329
July 22, 2008

Secretary Margaret Spellings
Office of the Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Spellings:

It has been my honor to serve as the chair of the Reading First Federal Advisory Committee for the past year. As you know, the Reading First Advisory Committee is an independent body required by legislation to review Reading First state performance data. A list of the committee members is attached.

Included below is a statement that the committee developed at its last meeting held in Washington, D.C. on June 23, 2008. The committee had met to review findings from the Reading First Impact Study interim report. While attending the meeting, the committee members learned of the action taken by the House appropriations subcommittee to eliminate funding for Reading First. Following a question/answer session with Dr. Russ Whitehurst and extensive discussion of the interim report, the committee voted unanimously to adopt the statement below. The committee felt that the interim report had caused confusion and misperceptions about the effectiveness of Reading First and had unduly influenced the House appropriations subcommittee to recommend elimination of funding for Reading First. The statement below urges Congress to refrain from eliminating funding for Reading First until the final Reading First Impact Study is released and until additional sources of data are studied.

We, members of the Reading First Federal Advisory Committee, met June 23, 2008 to review current findings regarding the impact of Reading First on student achievement. Three key concerns emerged during the meeting:

- 1) Limitations surrounding the design, methodology and analyses of the Reading First Impact Study.*
- 2) Unwarranted inferences being drawn from the Interim Report of the Reading First Impact Study. (Note: The committee will be generating a brief document in the very near future describing the limitations of the study and clarifying what has and has not been learned from the interim findings of the Reading First Impact Study.)*

- 3) *Lack of consideration of other sources of information about the effectiveness of Reading First. These include the forthcoming final report of the Reading First Impact Study from the Institute of Education Sciences, evaluation reports from the individual states, and additional data analyses requested by this Committee. Certainly, any decisions about funding should consider multiple sources of data.*

Based on these concerns, the Reading First Advisory Committee respectfully urges you to refrain from eliminating funding for Reading First at this time.

The committee asked Dr. Joseph Conaty to post the statement above on the Reading First website. The Reading First Federal Advisory Committee seeks your assistance also in distributing the above statement to members of Congress and the general public.

Four members of the Reading First Advisory Committee have developed a second statement that extends and amplifies the above statement. The draft, when approved by the entire committee, will fulfill our commitment to describe the limitations of the Reading First Impact Study interim report and to clarify what has and has not been learned from that preliminary report. We, of course, will send you that document as soon as it earns the approval of the entire committee. Again, the Reading First Advisory Committee seeks your help in distributing the statement above and the expanded document to come to members of Congress who will decide the fate of Reading First. We believe that Congress wants to make any decisions concerning Reading First in light of accurate and complete information concerning the progress of students in the program.

Thank you for your support of the Reading First program and the Federal Reading First Advisory Committee. Speaking personally (but not necessarily for the committee), I believe that the Reading First program has significantly "raised the bar" concerning federal education policy. Let's make sure that we build upon this milestone.

Sincerely,



Katherine A. Mitchell
Chair, Reading First Federal Advisory Committee
Former Assistant State Superintendent of Education for Reading in Alabama

Cc: Members of the Reading First Federal Advisory Committee
Dr. Joseph Conaty
Ms. Deborah Spitz